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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KABUL 002831

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: BASHARDOST PREACHES POPULIST GOSPEL TO AMBASSADOR

REF: KABUL 2293

Classified By: D/Pol Counselor Victoria Alvarado for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador met with presidential candidate and MP Ramazan Bashardost at his tent near Parliament on September 14. Bashardost was congenial, often quoting U.S. Presidents like John F. Kennedy, and noting his strong support of President Obama. The Ambassador congratulated Bashardost on his significant contribution to the election debate, while Bashardost thanked the Ambassador for U.S. support for Afghanistan's elections. The candidate emphasized that now was the time to speak strongly against human rights offenders, provide a better life for normal Afghans to prevent violence, and ensure international contractors do not pocket assistance funds. He urged the United States to support the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) and its auditing and recount procedures, including by helping support the ECC's transportation needs. We concurred, and informed him that the U.S. Mission Air is already providing the necessary transport support for the fraud investigators. End Summary.

Bashardost Gets 9 Percent - So Far

¶2. (C) Bashardost is a member of the Lower House of Parliament and the former Planning Minister under Karzai (reftel). He was dismissed after having announced that all international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be declared illegal and removed from the country. He is known as an eccentric populist who donates his salary to the poor and often sleeps in a tent (reftel). He has a penchant for confronting warlords about their human rights records and corruption. He received 9.2% of the preliminary votes according to the September 12 International Elections Commission (IEC) announcement. Bashardost appeals to what he says are "average Afghans." Our interlocutors tell us day laborers and Hazaras are among some of his most strident followers. He did well in Hazara-heavy provinces like Bamyan, but also received votes in heavily Tajik and Pashtun areas, which lends credence to his claims of being more of a cross-ethnic candidate than some of the others. His primary campaign issue was anti-corruption.

Stop Warlord Support

¶3. (C) Thanking us for our visit, the French-educated Bashardost noted that this was the first time an American Ambassador had come to his tent. He seemed to interpret our call as an important symbolic gesture. Bashardost commented that previous U.S. Ambassadors had enjoyed tea with warlords, but not with him. The tone of the meeting was very positive. He made frequent positive references to U.S. democracy, former presidents, such as John F. Kennedy and Abraham

Lincoln, as well as President Barack Obama. He also remarked that, "Obama needs to be told that if you do not speak strongly to the warlords and Karzai, they will think you are afraid." He noted these "human rights abusers" are currently enjoying large houses, many wives and cars, all thanks to U.S. taxpayers.

¶4. (C) He suggested that a clear change in policy occur following the elections. Specifically, traditional figures, such as Sayyaf, Khalili, Dostum, Fahim and Rabbani, should move on to make room for a younger Afghan generation. This new generation should be empowered with ministerial and other prominent political roles. Otherwise, "the Afghans would only view the Americans as supporting the human rights offenders that killed their families." He also warned that if there is no real change in this policy in the next two years, Afghans would increasingly turn against the United States. He said the Afghans had no problem with the Americans, but instead waged war against Karzai and the traditional power brokers he represents. For example, he said Fahim cannot travel to Panjshir, his home province, without heavy security, because "his own people would kill him." (Note: Bashardost travels in an un-armored Toyota Corolla, without security guards. End Note.)

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Improve the Lives of Normal Afghans
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¶5. (C) Bashardost asserted that U.S. policy must focus on improving the lives of "normal Afghans." He noted that Karzai, like former U.S. Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, viewed

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the Afghan political scene through a tribal lens, which limits democracy in Afghanistan. He noted that the Hazaras, the Tajiks, the Uzbeks and the Pashtuns do not seek a ministry, but rather, electricity, water, and food. Bashardost argued that viewing the ministries as the properties of particular ethnic blocks is wrong, commenting that when he was Planning Minister he appointed deputy ministers from every ethnicity, as well as females and males, and received considerable Hazara blow-back for this move. He said this vision is necessary to achieve long-term peace and security in Afghanistan. His campaign and the 9 percent he has received so far is proof that "average Afghans want change and democracy," he said. Bashardost suggested that if the United States rebuilt Afghanistan as it did post-WW II Japan, it would gain an important long-term strategic partner.

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Focus on the Younger Generation
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¶6. (C) Bashardost underscored the need to empower the younger generations to help Afghanistan move away from the traditional power brokers and its historic ethnic battles. In particular, it was important that this generation be selected for key roles in the new government, and that the United States should encourage them to run in the 2010 parliamentary elections. He emphasized that the younger, highly-educated generation of Afghans is the key to democratic development in Afghanistan. He shared his plans to travel to the provinces to search for these future politicians, and help them run in the upcoming parliamentary elections. When the Ambassador asked if he intended to form a political party, Bashardost replied that he would find "another way," as political parties continue to have an unfortunate tribal-related stigma in Afghanistan, and if he formed a party, people would think of it as yet another Hazara party.

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Give the Money to the Afghans
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¶7. (C) Bashardost noted that with the 31 billion USD of assistance over the last seven years, the international community could have re-built Afghanistan twice. He expressed frustration with the international NGOs that "kept their money in Switzerland." He said if the United States and the international community could count on honest Afghan ministries, Afghanistan could thrive. He commented before the meeting formally started that "Karzai is the king of corruption, and Abdullah is the queen."

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Do Something about Foreign Meddling
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¶8. (C) Bashardost proffered that while Afghanistan had suffered from outside meddling from countries like Russia, Iran and Pakistan, most Afghans still viewed the United States as "their only hope." He said Iran had interfered considerably in the Afghan election, and that America should confront Iran, and the others, on their role in supporting presidential candidates, as well as other meddling. Bashardost asserted that Afghanistan should not allow Iran to have an equal status with the United States, since U.S. interests and the Afghan interests are the same, while Iran has a different agenda. (Comment: This view is an anomaly for a Hazara, a largely Shia group often closely affiliated with Shia-dominated Iran. Bashardost's position shows his willingness to stand up to even those within his ethnic power base. End Comment.)

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Support the Elections Process
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¶9. (C) Bashardost claimed that both Karzai and Abdullah were responsible for systematic fraud. On the elections results, Bashardost implied that the IEC was under the influence of Karzai. He insisted that both the international community and the Afghan people must respect the elections process. Bashardost added that the ECC leadership had told him they had inadequate resources to travel to all of the provinces where they should investigate alleged fraud. He suggested that Obama should send Air Force One to help with a task of such high priority for the United States. The Ambassador concurred that the elections process must be respected, informing Bashardost that we had that very morning provided U.S. Mission Air support for the fraud investigators.

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